



Israel troops withdraw from corridor that split Gaza in two



Israeli troops have withdrawn from the Netzarim Corridor - a military zone cutting off the north of the Gaza Strip from the south. Israeli troops withdraw from corridor that split Gaza in two. Hundreds of Palestinians in cars and on carts laden with mattresses and other goods began returning to northern Gaza following the pull-out - often to scenes of utter destruction.

The Israeli withdrawal is in line with the Israel-Hamas ceasefire agreement of 19 January under which 16 Israeli hostages and 566 Palestinian prisoners have so far been freed. By the end of the first stage of the ceasefire in three weeks' time, 33 hostages and 1,900 prisoners are expected to have been freed. Israel says eight of the 33 are dead. Hamas seized 251 hostages and killed about 1,200 people when it attacked Israel on 7 October 2023, triggering the Gaza war.

At least 48,189 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's offensive, according to Gaza's Hamas-run health ministry. About two-thirds of Gaza's buildings have been damaged or destroyed by Israel's attacks, the UN says. About 700,000 residents of northern Gaza fled to southern areas at the start of the war, when the Israeli military issued mass evacuation orders before launching a ground invasion of the Palestinian territory.

Many of those displaced were subsequently forced to move multiple times after Israeli forces pushed into southern Gaza, too. They were also prevented from returning to their homes through the Netzarim Corridor, stretching from the Gaza-Israel border to the Mediterranean Sea.

Israeli forces partially withdrew from the west of the corridor last month and the first Palestinians - pedestrians - were allowed to walk along the coastal Rashid Street as they crossed into northern Gaza. The Haaretz newspaper says the Hamas-run Gaza interior ministry has been urging people to "exercise caution and adhere to the existing movement guidelines for their safety".